

# Character Builder 您好學? 呀

The basic unit of the Chinese language is the *zi* (字), i.e. a Chinese word. Each *zi* has a written form (called a character, made up of strokes), a sound (made up of consonant and vowel) and a meaning (or multiple meanings). When we speak or write Chinese, we string *zi* together to form terms, phrases and sentences.

In Putonghua (the spoken form of Modern Standard Chinese) each *zi* is pronounced in one of four tones:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4<sup>th</sup> tone: 4 = diacritical mark \ pitch: 5 to 1, highest to lowest

To pronounce each *zi* below, follow its pinyin and the given tone number. Light-sound words, which have no definite pitch, carry no diacritical mark and are marked by 0.

This week: Words about cosmetic surgery

削

Putonghua pronunciation: *xiao1, xue1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *seuk3*

Meaning: cut, pare, reduce, weaken

削 (radical 刂 = 刀 *dao1*, knife/blade) pronounced “xiao1” means cut/pare: 削刀 (*xiao1 dao1* = paring-knife), 削皮 (*xiao1 pi2* = pare-off-skin), 削鉛筆 (*xiao1 qian1 bi3* = pare-lead-pen = sharpen pencil with knife/pencil-sharpener).

削 pronounced “xue1” means cut/reduce. 瘦削 (*shou4 xue1* = thin-bony) = gaunt-looking. Foreman 剝削 (*bo1 xue1* = peel-pare = exploits) workers, 削減 (*xue1 jian3* = cut-reduce) wages, 削弱 (*xue1 ruo4* = reduce-weaken) company’s reputation, got 削職 (*xue1 zhi2* = cut-post = sacked). 削足就履 (*xue1 zu2 jiu4 lv3* = cut-foot-accommodate-shoe) means cutting expenses to fit budget.

整容醫生 (*zheng3 rong2 yi1 sheng1* = reconstruct/reform-face/appearance-medical-member = cosmetic surgeon) performs 削骨手術 (*xiao1 gu3 shou3 shu4* = pare-bone-hand-method = osteotomy) to reduce huge nose.